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8 July 2010

Mr Richard Pickard
Kirkley Community High School
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Lowestoft
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Dear Mr Pickard

Special measures: monitoring inspection of Kirkley Community High School

Following my visit with David Cousins and Alan Brewerton, Additional Inspectors, to your school on Tuesday 6 and Wednesday 7 July 2010, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The visit was the third monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures in March 2009. The monitoring inspection report is attached and the main judgements are set out below.

Progress since being subject to special measures – satisfactory.

Progress since previous monitoring inspection – satisfactory.

Newly Qualified Teachers may not be appointed.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be posted on the Ofsted website.

I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the chair of the Interim Executive Board and the Director of Children's Services for Suffolk.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector



Special measures: monitoring of Kirkley Community High School

Report from the third monitoring inspection on 6 and 7 July 2010

Evidence

Inspectors observed 28 lessons and four form periods. Two of the lesson observations were carried out jointly by HMI with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Visits were also made to the Year 10 and sixth form assemblies. Inspectors scrutinised documents including the school's academic tracking system, exclusion records, behaviour logs, school action plans and other self-evaluations. They met with three members of the Interim Executive Board (IEB), two senior advisers from the local authority, members of the senior leadership team, middle managers, and panels of students from Years 9, 10 and 12. HMI met regularly with the headteacher throughout the visit, and the headteacher attended team meetings, including the final session where judgements were made.

In view of the impending closure of the sixth form, a small number of sixth form lessons were observed by inspectors, in addition to the student panel meeting and the assembly visit.

Context

There have been few changes in the teaching staff since the last monitoring visit. The school is still without permanent subject leaders in religious studies and modern languages, although the head of English has returned from maternity leave. However, there will be further significant changes in September 2010 as at least 13 staff will be leaving at the end of this term. There have been no changes to the senior leadership team. An additional deputy headteacher post was advertised externally and interviews held, but no appointment was made. However, a permanent, full-time business manager has been appointed and will shortly be taking up her post.

Shortly after the last monitoring visit in March 2010, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published its review of National Challenge schools in Suffolk. This recommended that the school be fast tracked to become an 11-16 Academy by September 2010. This recommendation was accepted by the former Secretary of State on 25 March 2010, and also by the local authority. Since then, the decision to move Years 7 and 8 to the school in September 2010 has been reversed by the local authority and the academy process has not proceeded. However, the decision to close the sixth form was upheld, partly in response to the school's budgetary situation and further reductions in funding by the Learning and Skills Council. From September 2010, sixth form education in Lowestoft will be delivered by the two other high schools in the town, although a small amount of teaching will remain at Kirkley to make best use of specialist provision.



Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning

The school continues to refine and develop its tracking systems. It now has a detailed picture of how well different groups of students are achieving and there has been a good number of focused interventions to support those who are struggling. Around one-third of Year 11 students has benefitted from one-to-one mentoring, which is the largest proportion in the local authority. Overall, the school predicts that, with all courses and examinations now completed, 38% of Year 11 students will achieve five or more good GCSE grades. If achieved, this would be better than the overall figure attained in 2009, but would be just short of the school's overall target. However, the current Year 10 group's predicted outcomes fall some way short of their target. The school recognises that intensive and continued intervention will be required to support these students in the final year of their course.

The school awaits the 2010 examination results, to be published in August; inspectors will report on and evaluate these results in detail in the next monitoring visit.

During this visit, inspectors gave a particular focus to the quality and standards of work in students' books and files, as an indicator of the extent to which they enjoy their learning. In the best instances, students show immense pride and a deal of creativity. The most tangible example of this is in art and design, not only where students' work gives vibrancy to the corridors and learning environment but also where their sketchbooks show the strength of their learning and enjoyment. However, this is in stark contrast to many exercise books seen by inspectors, where work was poorly presented. Too many books seen were in poor condition with graffiti on the covers, or with inappropriate scribbling alongside work; in too many instances, this was not challenged by teachers. The new school year provides a good opportunity to reinforce expectations for high standards of presentation of work as an important factor in raising expectations for literacy, overall achievement, and students' ownership of their learning.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the progress that all groups of pupils make, and the standards they reach, by: implementing further the school's tracking process, identifying where underachievement lies, intervening to counter it and eliminating its causes – satisfactory.

Other relevant pupil outcomes

As with the academic tracking system, senior leaders have continued to develop systems for logging and reporting incidents of inappropriate behaviour. While there are still too many of these incidents, the number of temporary exclusions has decreased since the last monitoring visit. Students told inspectors that behaviour has improved noticeably over the past year. In the Year 10 assembly observed, and



generally around the school, the great majority of students were seen to be behaving sensibly. The use of support and reporting systems for poorly-behaved students has improved too. In response to the area for improvement set at the last monitoring visit, a staff training session was held at the start of the summer term to reinforce the links between poor behaviour and poor teaching. There remain instances of students being sent out of classrooms during lessons and, where such indiscipline happens, it is still often the case that this is related to weak teaching. Nevertheless, satisfactory progress has been made with improving behaviour since the March 2009 inspection.

Senior leaders have also worked hard to promote good attendance, including liaising with parents and outside agencies. Similarly, though, current attendance levels fall some way short of the school's target and persistent absence remains significantly above the national average.

Because of the impending transfer of sixth-form students to other local schools, inspectors took time on this visit to speak with students, to seek their views about this change. Understandably, students expressed very strong opinions about what they perceive to be a lack of consultation and consideration of their views and concerns. Although inspectors recognise that decisions were made in consideration of the long-term stability and financial health of the school, the immediate achievement and well-being of these students is equally important. HMI has asked the local authority and the school to take immediate action to listen to the concerns of sixth-form students and ensure that they are fully supported, both academically and socially, over this transition period and throughout the remainder of their A-Level courses.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Take decisive action to reduce, significantly, instances of poor behaviour in lessons where these are linked to weaknesses in teaching - satisfactory.

The effectiveness of provision

With good support from individual local authority consultants, the school has continued to carry out a full programme of lesson observations involving all teaching staff. There continue to be examples of good teaching, particularly in the physical education specialism. There have been two significant improvements from the last monitoring visit. Firstly, monitoring has become sharper in its focus on students' learning; consequently, judgements have become more accurate. This view was supported by the two joint observations carried out by HMI with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, which both resulted in agreements of judgement. The second improvement is in the decisiveness shown in calling staff to account where there are repeated instances of inadequate teaching, and also in providing support programmes where the need is identified. In all observations during this visit, lessons were planned to a common framework and with clear objectives. Inspectors



also appreciated the improved quality of professional dialogue with teachers in feedback following observations, again demonstrating impact of the school's observation programme. While all this is very positive, however, the fact remains that there are too many lessons observed – whether by inspectors, the local authority, or the school's senior leaders – where teaching or learning is inadequate. Some of these are because of poor subject knowledge by teachers having to work outside their specialist area. In other cases, students have been taught by a succession of temporary staff. There are also instances of teachers showing thorough planning and good subject knowledge but failing to place enough emphasis on the quality of students' learning. Such lessons are sometimes typified by impressive teacher presentations during which, however, students sit passively and play little part. A contrast to this was a Year 10 history class about the Vietnam War, where students were engaged throughout most of the lesson in a series of challenging analysis and writing activities carried out at pace and with high expectations of the quality of work they should produce.

Clear progress has been made in identifying and acting decisively where teaching is weak. However, the school recognises that there is some way to go before the quality of teaching is consistently and securely satisfactory across the school.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of learning by: identifying and eliminating weaknesses in teaching and bringing about rapid improvement so that there is no inadequate and more good and outstanding teaching – satisfactory.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

There have been further improvements in subject leader mentoring by the senior leadership team, and a small group has started the 'Leading from the Middle' programme. Better use is being made of tracking data to intervene where behaviour or attendance is a concern, although there is more to be done before both are good enough across the school. The reorganisation of the pastoral and tutorial system into three smaller 'schools' from September 2010 is designed to give greater leadership responsibilities to the three assistant headteachers and the three learning leaders and, it is hoped, to bring further improvements to behaviour, attendance, and students' attitudes in general. Inspectors will evaluate the initial impact of this initiative in the next monitoring visit.

All of the newly-qualified teachers have completed their probationary year successfully. This is a considerable achievement, given the challenging circumstances in which they are working. They told inspectors that they have greatly appreciated the support given to them by their mentors and local authority consultants.

Since the last visit, the IEB has ratified the school's policies for equalities and safeguarding. The school continues to follow all required procedures for vetting staff



and volunteers. The IEB has further improved its understanding of the school's performance and is increasingly aware of the need for the school to compare itself rigorously against national expectations, rather than against its own previous performance. An important priority for the IEB over the coming months will be to make arrangements for the transition of its interim responsibilities to a re-constituted governing body.

Despite these positive aspects, there can be no disputing the fact that much of the school leadership's attentions, and particularly those of the headteacher, have continued to be taken by financial matters. It is commendable that the school has made tough decisions to reduce staffing costs and create a meaningful and realistic budget for the next year but, nevertheless, the considerable historic overspend remains an added distraction to the business of improving educational provision and outcomes for students. The leadership has been supported effectively by local authority-brokered consultants, but it remains clear that the senior leadership team requires strengthening on a day-to-day operational basis to enable it to deal more rapidly with the significant number and range of issues that remain.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Improve the overall quality of leadership and management by: ensuring that the work of those who have leadership responsibilities is regularly monitored by senior leaders and that they are given the support and challenge necessary for them to carry out all their responsibilities effectively – satisfactory.
- Bring about improvements at a more rapid pace than in the past by: ensuring that the school monitors and evaluates the impact of its work and policies on all groups of pupils more effectively – satisfactory.
- Take the steps necessary to ensure that the school is well governed by: ensuring that all governors are well informed about their roles and responsibilities in governing the school – satisfactory.

External support

The local authority has been very supportive through provision of subject consultants and through brokering external consultancy to the senior leadership. The efforts of these individual colleagues has been appreciated greatly by staff, as has the help with recruiting the new business manager and setting a more structured budget for next year. The National Challenge Adviser has continued to produce detailed and honest progress reports and these have in turn helped the senior team and IEB to gain a more realistic understanding of the school's position.

The confusion and changes of plan regarding the school's future status were not entirely within the school's and the local authority's control. Nevertheless, it is clear



that these provided further diversions that have not helped the school's recovery. While the school has, overall, made satisfactory progress since March 2009 in dealing with the key issues for improvement, the IEB, senior leaders and the local authority are aware that this progress is not yet secure. The local reorganisation arrangements and the continued budget deficit, with the significant constraints that these place on staffing, remain significant additional distractions and present continued risks to the school's sustained improvement.

Progress since the last visit on the areas for improvement:

- Review, as a matter of urgency, the position of the school particularly with regard to the substantial budget deficit, the local authority and DCSF proposals for local provision, and the need to strengthen support for the senior leadership team - inadequate.

Priorities for further improvement

- To improve achievement and standards of literacy, and increase the pride and ownership that students have of their studies, set and achieve good standards of presentation of work across the school.
- In partnership with the local authority and with other schools, ensure that sixth form students benefit from high levels of personal and academic guidance and support during the transition arrangements and throughout Year 13.